

Digel Block
218-20-22 South Main
Hannibal
Marion County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1875

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64-HANNIBAL
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PHOTOGRAPHS
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P. O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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DIGEL BLOCK

Location: 218-20-22 South Main and 112 Lyon Streets; south 1/3 of lot 7 and west 80 feet of lot 8, Block 3, Hannibal, Marion County, Missouri

Present Owner: Hannibal Pride, Inc.

Present Use: Vacant. The building will be demolished for a Corps of Engineers flood control project

Significance: The Digel Block is a good example of turn of the century small town commercial architecture. The vernacular form includes varied and unusual ornamentation. Digel Block is the last of the commercial buildings constructed to serve the railroad trade coming from the old Union Depot which used to be on the other side of Lyon Street. It is also one of the few remaining examples of construction by the Courtney Brothers who were major commercial building contractors from 1898 until around 1920 in Hannibal.

Construction Date: The south two-thirds of the building was constructed in 1901. The north third was added by 1906. The building was built for Gottlob Digel (earlier spelled Gottfried Diegel) who came to Hannibal around 1885 and was involved in the brewry and tavern business.

Architect: An architect for the structure could not be identified. Hannibal history indicates the Courtney Brothers were involved in design as well as construction and may have played this role. The eclectic use of varied ornamentation forms suggests vernacular/local design and quite probably included owner suggestions.

Original and Subsequent Owners

Gottlob Digel, first owner of Digel Block, began doing business at the address in 1895. The first two-thirds of the building was completed in 1901 and the final third in 1906. Digel retired around 1908 and turned the business over his son-in-law, John Draudt.¹ The building was subsequently sold to the Orths who ran the Hannibal News out of the building from the 1930's to the 1950's, then to Francis McDowell, then to Robert Frazer, and finally to the current owners, Hannibal Pride, Inc.²

Historical Narrative

Digel Block building opened in 1901 with two separate businesses and upstairs apartments. One of the commercial buildings was a saloon operated by builder and first owner, Gottlob Digel.³ The building was built to house businesses that catered to the bustling railroad trade that got off the train at the old Union Depot which was located across Lyon Street from the Digel Building.⁴ A third section was added to the building by 1906 which was similar to each of the original two components of the building. These approximate 16 foot wide by 60± foot long commercial spaces held several small service and retail oriented businesses from 1901 until the 1970's including the Hannibal News from the 1930's until the 1950's. With the decline in rail transportation, the service and retail use of the Digel Block also declined. Businesses located in the building in recent decades have generally been short term. Commercial use of the building suffered a major setback as a result of the 1973 flood from which it never did recover.⁵ At present, the structure is in very poor condition and has been condemned as unsafe for occupancy by the city.

The Courtney Brothers of Hannibal were the contractors who constructed Digel Block. The brothers, Ernest and Roy, were both born in Hannibal in the 1870's and learned carpentering from their carpenter and builder father.⁶ The brothers formed the firm of Courtney Bros. in 1898 and began building commercial structures in Hannibal.⁷ Their buildings were an important part of turn of the century Hannibal commercial and public life and included the Beggs,

Goodson Wagon Factory, the Bluff City Shoe Factory, the Courtney Building, the Star Shoe Factory, Branham Flats, the High School building, and a number of residences.⁸ Some of these structures still survive in Hannibal. Several of the business buildings apparently were financed through the Hannibal Business Men's Association which originated in 1898 and collected donations of money and land for the purposes of building commercial concerns.⁹ Hannibal business directories indicate the Courtney brothers were also involved in retail trade including the shoe and boot business during and following their successful contracting business.¹⁰

Architectural Information

The Digel Block Building is typical of small town commercial structures built around the turn of the century.

Although the exterior of the building is in fair condition, the interior is in bad shape. Floors have collapsed in some rooms and are near collapse in others. Ceilings have fallen in several rooms. Numerous windows are broken or missing.

Built on a rectangular plan, the building measures approximately 59 feet by 64 feet. The corner facing the intersection of Main and Lyon Streets is truncated. The exterior walls are brick laid in stretcher bond.

Two brick chimneys are near the edge of the roof on the Lyon Street side. Concrete chimneys are near the edge of the roof in the rear of the building.

Four doors face Main Street, two face Lyon Street, and one door is placed at the corner entrance. The door have multiple panels and lights, and some have mail slots. The ground level windows along Main Street are large storefront windows. A single large storefront window as well as a mullion connected pair face Lyon Street. All of the storefront windows and ground level doors have transoms. Steel lintels with decorative flower or wheels trim the windows. Ground level windows on Lyon Street have been boarded up.

The second level has one over one windows. Six face Lyon Street, nine face Main Street, and one window is placed in the Main-Lyon corner. The Lyon Street windows are trimmed with radiating stretchers with ashlar lugsills. Main Street windows are grouped in trios with continuous ashlar sills and lintels.

The flat roof is trimmed with a decorative parapet. At the Main-Lyon corner, a rectangular parapet bears the inscription Digel Block. The arched parapet at the center of the Lyon Street side is inscribed "ERECTED anno 1901". Stone finials are located atop each of the nine pilasters, four of which are on the Main Street side while five face Lyon Street. The Main Street side has triple corbelling while the Lyon Street side has single corbelling decorating the parapet.

The ground floor of the building has been partitioned into three congruent areas consisting of a large room facing Main Street and a smaller room at the rear. Sinks and bathrooms are situated in the rear rooms as are stairs leading to the cellar.

The original floors, visible where later layers of floor coverings have been torn up, were constructed from 3 inch planks.

The original plaster walls are exposed where later additions of plywood panelling have been removed. Dropped ceilings were added at one time. Where these later ceilings have collapsed, the original pressed tin ceilings are visible. Originally the main floor ceilings were 14 feet high.

Interior window and door trim varied. Some windows and doors on the second floor had cyma recta molding while others had block and bull's eye trim.

The flues for the original wood stoves are still visible. No other heating or cooling equipment is currently in operation. The building has been wired for electricity.

Project Information

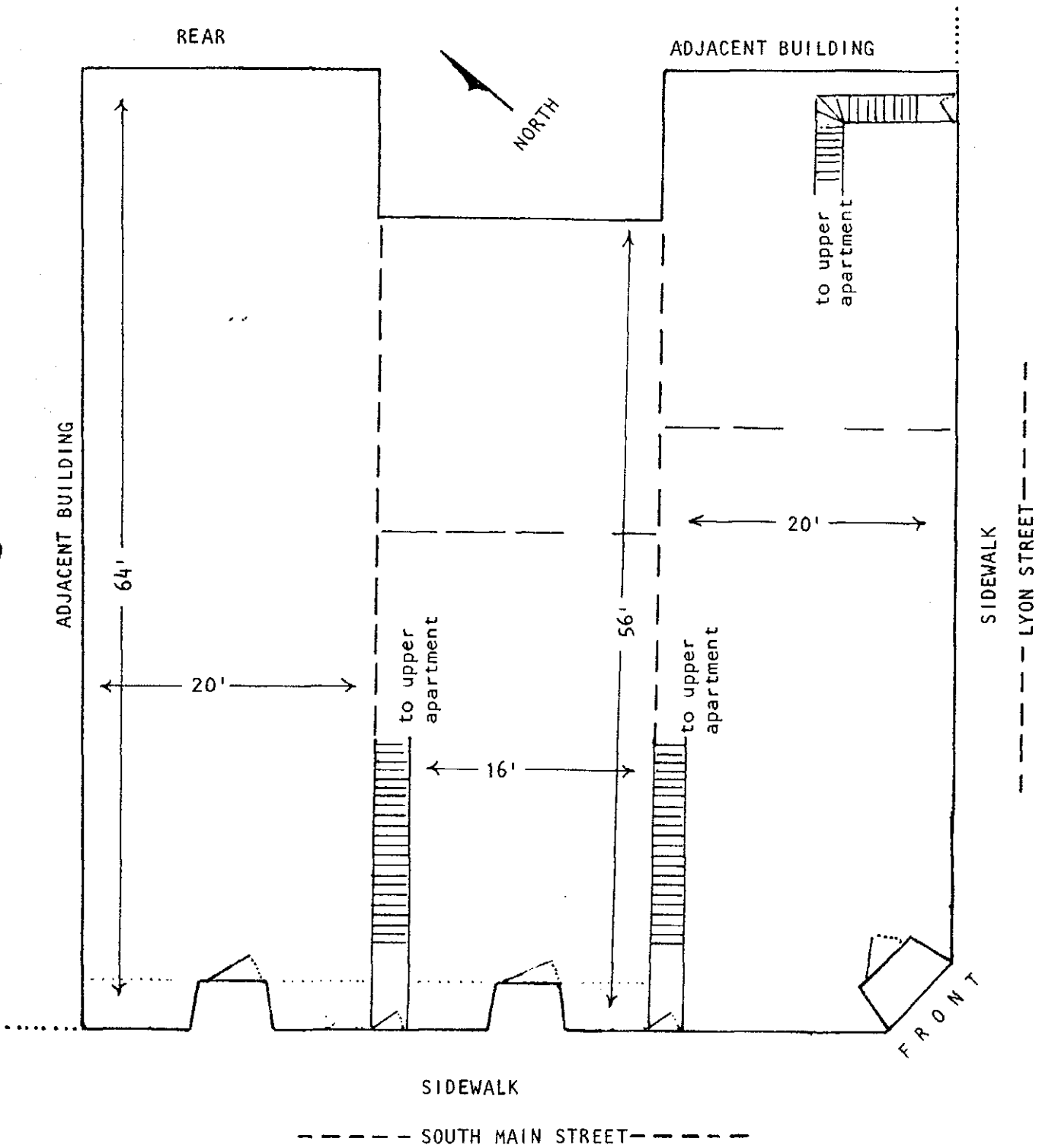
The Digel Block is scheduled for demolition as part of a Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District flood control project. The structure was severely damaged by the 1973 flood and is currently in very poor structural condition. Exact dates for removal of the building have not been established. There is no plan to renovate, move, or otherwise preserve Digel Block.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Missouri Department of Natural Resources/Historic Preservation Program "Historic Inventory" Form. 1984. Digel Block.
- 2 Personal Communication: Gene Guy, City Building Inspector. 1989.
- 3 Missouri Department of Natural Resources/Historic Preservation Program "Historic Inventory" Form. 1982. Digel Block.
- 4 Missouri Department of Natural Resources/Historic Preservation Program "Historic Inventory" Form. 1984. Digel Block.
- 5 Personal Communication: Gene Guy, Hannibal Building Inspector. 1989.
- 6 Greene, C. P. 1905. Mirror of Hannibal, Hannibal, p. 309.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., p. 147.
- 9 Ibid., p. 122.
- 10 Hackman, R. E. Hannibal City Directory, Quincy, Illinois. R. E. Hackmann, Publisher, 1920.

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